

Late Backup

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November 29, 2007

To the Honorable City of Austin Council Members:

I have lived in Austin since 1973. Much has changed about Austin in the past 34 years – Ben White is no longer a street nor the south perimeter of the city. In 1985 I purchased my home in the Forest Oaks neighborhood in South Austin. Again, much has changed in 22 years. A quiet, working class neighborhood where most residents were senior citizens, many of whom had purchased the 700-900 square foot homes when they were built and reared their families in them, has become another “central” neighborhood whose face is changing daily. Still considered fairly affordable by Austin standards until recently, many homeowners trying to get into the market have purchased homes in this area in the past 5-10 years and made this neighborhood their home.

The area whose boundaries are Ben White Blvd., Manchaca Rd, Stassney Ln and South 1st St. is surrounded by commercially zoned property on all sides – most of it developed during a time when small box grocery stores and strip malls ruled. When our neighborhood was given a deadline to opt-in or opt-out commercial properties for vertical mixed use, we saw this as an opportunity to have an impact on development in our rapidly changing neighborhood by supporting higher density on the perimeter commercial corridors so that the single family portions of the neighborhood could be preserved.

Despite the disadvantage of not having had an opportunity to go through the neighborhood planning process, the Southwood Neighborhood Association rallied to reach out to our large geographical area to include as many as possible in the process. Through meeting signs, flyers and the development of a list-serve, the Association “grew” its membership at the same time as it worked to meet the short timeline imposed by the VMU process.

VMU was defined and discussed at several general neighborhood meetings between November 2006 and May 2007. A committee was formed to specifically identify the commercial properties, discuss the various components of the application, seek expertise in areas where with which we were unfamiliar and complete the application. The information was presented at the May meeting for vote by the general membership and all items passed by at least 75% of the vote.

One of the things that make our neighborhood unique is the diversity that is found in residents – young and old, lower-income and higher-income, renters and owners. However, in the past few years the cost of property has become increasingly more expensive, pricing many folks out of the area. During the VMU process, one of the most important points of discussion was the hope that our neighborhood remains affordable. Thus our application reflects the desire that 10% of rental units be available and affordable to families that make 60% of our median family income. In addition, since this new development can only occur on commercial lots, where residential is not currently allowed, our application allows more housing supply in Austin, hopefully reducing pricing pressure renters and new owners.

Our application is also intended to provide incentives to commercial property owners to create development that is more pedestrian friendly and more aesthetically pleasing than what currently exists. Our neighborhood is already feeling the pressure of increased traffic. Again, our application hopes to promote better design and less parking and traffic generation than is currently possible with current zoning, and allow development that is more walkable, better designed, and preserves the central neighborhood.

I respectfully request that the council approve our application for VMU as submitted. I also request that the City speed up the timeline for neighborhood planning, give neighborhoods the support and time needed to create effective neighborhood plans and listen to and respect the neighborhood plans that they have put so much time and energy into creating.

Sincerely,
Dawn Leach
4614 Hank Ave.
512-442-7010
dleach4@sbcglobal.net



Rhoades, Wendy

From: Brenda K Cross [BKC20-20ent@austin.rr.com]
Sent: Wednesday, November 28, 2007 3:51 PM
To: Rhoades, Wendy
Cc: Christopher Ewen
Subject: VMU for Southwood Neighborhood
Attachments: Brenda K. Cross.vcf

Dear Ms Rhoades,

My name is Brenda K Cross and I am a member of the Southwood Neighborhood Association in south Austin.

With respect to the City Council Meeting of 11/29/07 and VMU for our neighborhood...the concept of VMU (vertical mixed use) was explained at several meeting beginning about a year ago.

I support higher density on the perimeter commercial corridors AND preservation of the single family portion of our neighborhood. At minimum, 10% (ten percent) of any rental units built should be available and affordable to families that make 60% or less of Austin's median family income.

As a personal aside, I'd prefer 25% of rental OR "for sale" units be affordable to families that make 60% or less of our median income - or we are likely to find ourselves in the same predicament as many larger cities (no affordable housing for our teachers, hotel service personnel, police, service employees, fire and EMT's, etc.)

As new VMU's are constructed, we would like development that is pedestrian and bike friendly...along with trees, shrubs, plants - that make this area even more beautiful.

Parking and traffic are always issues. Since common sense often conflicts with developer profits...let common sense rule. Use traffic calming designs - provide abundant parking so we who live here don't find our drives, streets and yards choked with added vehicles that have no space to park.

The goal is Vertical Mixed Use communities that cohabitate beneficially with our neighborhood. This means beauty, quiet, pedestrian, safety, affordable and preservation of the central neighborhood as a great place to live.

Thanks for your consideration,

**Brenda K Cross
4905 Hawk Cove
Austin 78745**

11/29/2007